

COMMUNICATION

Recognizing that the goal of the system is to protect children, all agencies are encouraged to share information to the extent permitted by law. All agencies, whether investigative, protective, dependency, or prosecution are to exchange information with each other in accordance with policy and WIC §827(j). All agencies are encouraged to participate in the County's Family and Child Index when it is available.

It is the intent of the Legislature that law enforcement and DCFS continue to communicate information learned about subsequent incidents or further disclosures of suspected abuse or neglect. {PC §11166.3}

All subsequent incidents of suspected abuse or neglect shall be cross reported to law enforcement, DCFS, and the District Attorney. Additional disclosures of already-cross-reported information should be discussed among the professionals assigned to the case in the various agencies.

Communication is essential when disciplines work together on a specific case involving a child victim or witness. The lack of such communication leaves individual professionals with a one-dimensional view of the case. State law allows for sharing of information among members of multi-disciplinary teams in child abuse cases. {WIC §827(j)}

Significant information should be shared in order to

- ensure child safety
- minimize traumatization
- generate an appropriate response
- provide for effective long-term planning

Many of the documents and proceedings relating to minors are confidential by statute, case law, and/or court order. Dependency court proceedings and records are confidential. {WIC §§827, 346} However, criminal court proceedings are not confidential. Where the crime involves a sexual offense, the victim's identity can remain confidential upon request and not be disclosed on any public records. {PC §293} Furthermore, the victim may, at the judge's discretion, be addressed as Jane or John Doe in court records and in court. {PC §293.5}

For the purpose of coordinating healthcare services and medical treatment to a minor, a provider of healthcare may disclose medical information to a county social worker, a probation officer, or any other person who is legally authorized to have custody or care of the minor. {CC § 56.103 (a)}

If the provider of healthcare determines that the disclosure of medical information concerning the diagnosis and treatment of a mental health condition of a minor is reasonably necessary for the purpose of assisting in coordinating the treatment and care of the minor that information may be disclosed. This disclosure does not apply to psychotherapy notes. {CC § 56.103 (e)}

“Minor” means a minor taken into temporary custody or as to whom a petition has been filed with the court, or who has been adjudged to be a dependent child or ward of the Juvenile Court pursuant to WIC §§ 300 or 601. {CC § 56.103 (g)}

Medical information disclosed under this section may not be further disclosed by the recipient unless for the purpose of coordinating the healthcare services and medical treatment of the minor and is authorized by law. [See also WIC § 5328.04]

Family and Children's Index [FCI]

FCI is an interagency data information system that ties together basic information about children and their families that have been identified as at-risk for abuse and neglect. The system permits authorized professionals from participating agencies to share basic information with a partner agency concerning a child or family meeting the above criteria. The statutory authority under which participating agencies are able to share information is found in WIC §18961.5. This statute authorizes counties to establish a computerized database system within the county to allow specified provider agencies to share specific identifying information regarding families at-risk of child abuse or neglect for the purpose of forming multi-disciplinary teams. Provider agencies are defined as governmental or other agencies that have as one of their purposes the prevention, identification, management, or treatment of child abuse and neglect. A plan to extend and enhance the FCI is underway. County departments currently participating:

- Los Angeles Sheriff's Department
- DCFS
- Department of Public Social Services
- Department of Probation
- Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health [DMH]
- District Attorney
- Department of Health Services